

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

7TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

October 12, 2022

The Honorable Rohit Chopra
Director
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
1700 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20552

The Honorable Jerome Powell
Chair
Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System
Twentieth Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20551

The Honorable Martin Gruenberg
Acting Chairman
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation
550 Seventeenth Street, NW, Room 6076
Washington, DC 20429

Mr. Michael Hsu
Acting Comptroller of the Currency
Office of the Comptroller of the Currency
400 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20219

The Honorable Todd Harper
Chairman
National Credit Union Administration
1775 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3428

Dear Director Chopra, Chair Powell, Acting Chairman Gruenberg, Acting Comptroller Hsu, and Chairman Harper:

As the heads of the federal regulatory agencies charged with overseeing our nation's financial institutions and consumer protection laws, I am writing to bring your attention a matter of urgent concern.

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and unfortunately, domestic violence remains extremely prevalent in the United States. One in four women¹, one in two transgender individuals², and one in nine men³ will be subjected to some form of domestic violence in their lifetime.

The economic impact of domestic violence on a survivor's long-term financial security cannot be understated. Survivors of domestic violence collectively lose a total eight million days of paid work each year and face economic losses exceeding \$8.3 billion per year.⁴ A key obstacle that prevents domestic violence survivors from reaching long-term safety is economic abuse. Economic abuse is present in ninety-nine percent of domestic violence cases⁵ and occurs when a harm-doer controls a survivor's finances through coercion, deception, fraud, and/or manipulation. Examples of economic abuse includes when a harm-doer steals money from a survivor, controls a survivor's access to their own money, fraudulently opens a credit card in a survivor's name, or accesses a survivor's online bank account without their knowledge or consent.

In fact, fifty-eight percent of survivors—more than nineteen million individuals in the United States—report that a harm-doer has monitored, accessed, withdrawn from, or otherwise controlled their account.⁶ Without access to a safe and protected account, building the financial security necessary to reach long-term safety is a difficult and dangerous process.

In order to build the financial security necessary to stay safe, heal, and rebuild their lives, survivors need access to tailored consumer products and support from their financial institutions—including access to safe and protected accounts. This is particularly important for survivors in communities of color, especially women, who experience intimate partner violence at higher rates than White women,⁷ and whose households are more likely to report not having a bank account.⁸ Moreover, fifty-one percent of survivors report they would utilize products and services specifically tailored for survivors at their financial institution if they knew they were available.⁹

¹ S.G. Smith, X. Zhang, K.C. Basile, M.T. Merrick, J. Wang, M. Kresnow, and J. Chen, *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2015 Data Brief—Updated Release*. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018). <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/2015data-brief508.pdf>

² S.E. James, J.L. Herman, S. Rankin, M. Keisling, L. Mottet, and M. Anafi, *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, The National Center for Transgender Equality (2016). <https://www.ustranssurvey.org/reports/#2015report>

³ [Statistics \(ncadv.org\)](https://www.ncadv.org)

⁴ [How employment helps female victims of intimate partner violence: A qualitative study. - PsycNET \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org)

⁵ A.E. Adams, C.M. Sullivan, and M.R. Greeson, *Development of the Scale of Economic Abuse*, 14 *Violence Against Women* (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801208315529>

⁶ FreeFrom, *Support Every Survivor*. The 19 million statistic was calculated based on the total population of [cisgender women](#) and [transgender individuals](#) in the U.S., the prevalence of domestic violence among [cisgender women](#) and [transgender individuals](#) in the U.S., and the percentage of survivors without a safe, protected bank account.

⁷ [WOCN DV Facts \(ctcadv.org\)](https://www.ctcadv.org)

⁸ [FDIC 2019 SurveyReport-book](#)

⁹ Kirkley Doyle, Amy Durrence, and Sonya Passi, *Survivors Know Best: How to Disrupt Intimate Partner Violence During COVID-19 and Beyond*, FreeFrom (2020). <https://www.freefrom.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Survivors-Know-Best.pdf>

The evidence is clear: financial institutions need to be doing more to reduce the economic abuse of survivors and ensure survivors' financial livelihoods are protected.

Therefore, to reduce the prevalence of economic abuse of domestic violence survivors carried out through financial institutions, I am requesting answers to the following questions from each of your agencies:

- 1) How does your agency or department work with federally regulated financial institutions to identify economic abuse of domestic violence survivors that is carried out through federally regulated financial institutions?
- 2) What is your agency's or department's process for enabling federally-regulated financial institutions to report economic abuse of domestic violence survivors to your agency or department?
 - 2a) If your agency or department does not have a reporting process for enabling federally regulated financial institutions to report economic abuse of domestic violence survivors to your agency or department, please explain why no such reporting process is in place.
- 3) How does your agency or department compile data from federally regulated financial institutions to monitor statistics and trends of economic abuse that is carried out through federally regulated financial institutions?
 - 3a) If your agency or department does not compile data from federally regulated financial institutions in order to monitor statistics and trends of economic abuse that is carried out through federally regulated financial institutions, please explain why your agency or department does not compile this data.
- 4) How does your agency or department work with federally regulated financial institutions to ensure their customer facing employees are properly trained to identify economic abuse and work with domestic violence survivors to ensure their financial assets are properly protected from their harm-doer?

To further ensure that the financial well-being of domestic violence survivors are protected, I am encouraging your agencies and departments to convene a joint working group with representatives of federally regulated financial institutions and expert individuals and organizations in the movement to end domestic violence. Convening this joint working group will ensure that the risk of economic abuse is better identified and prevented, and that financial institution customers are better protected from this type of exploitation. In particular, I am encouraging you to work with organizations within the movement to end domestic violence that have expertise in economic abuse of survivors.

I appreciate your departments' and agencies' work to ensure that consumers across the United States are protected and supported. I am eager to receive your answers to the above questions and to work with you and support your effort in ensuring consumers who have been subjected to domestic violence and economic abuse are financially protected.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nydia M. Velázquez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nydia" being more prominent.

Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress